

### 3.7 LIVESTOCK AND GRAZING MANAGEMENT

The Vernal Field Office currently administers grazing on 167 allotments throughout the VPA. Of these, five grazing allotments (Dry Creek, Hoy Flat, Offield Mountain, South Pot Creek, and Wild Mountain–Colorado) are located entirely outside the VPA boundary and two allotments (Max Canyon and Blind Canyon) are located entirely on private land inholdings within the VPA. The 160 allotments within the VPA designated for livestock grazing encompass approximately 1,691,116 acres of BLM land. An additional 545,887 acres of other lands (private, state, tribal, etc.) are included within these allotments.

Livestock are regularly permitted to graze on 153 of the 160 allotments as follows: cattle (113), sheep (27), sheep and cattle (12), and horses (1). A few of the cattle and/or sheep allotments also permit some horses. Forty-five of the 153 allotments are currently grazed under a deferment rotation system, which involves delaying grazing in an allotment until the seed maturity of the key forage species. The remaining 108 allotments do not have a recognized grazing system.

On the remaining 7 allotments (Red Creek Flat, Rye Grass, Marshall Draw, Taylor Flat, Warren Draw South, Watson-Diamond Mountain and Sears Canyon), cattle are permitted on a temporary, non-renewable basis; however, such use is discretionary.

Within the VPA, 146,220 animal unit months (AUMs) are allocated for livestock, but active permitted use for the 160 allotments is currently 137,897 AUMs. However, the demand for forage resources by livestock (the total average actual use) for the past 10 years was only 78,500 AUMs.<sup>1</sup> Suspended use for the 160 allotments is currently 26,364 AUMs. Comprehensive grazing allotment information is summarized in Appendix N.

#### 3.7.1 Past Grazing Management Categories and Current Range Conditions, Carrying Capacity, Management, and Facilities

Ecological conditions of the two former RMAs (Diamond Mountain and Book Cliffs) were assessed and identified using two different evaluation methods. In the 1994 Diamond Mountain RMP, allotments were evaluated according to seral stages, (Early, Mid or Late). In the 1985 Book Cliffs RMP, allotments were evaluated as being in Excellent, Good, Fair, or Poor ecological condition.

In 1997, the BLM in Utah developed *Standards for Rangeland Health and Guidelines for Grazing Management* (see Appendix I). These standards are descriptions of the desired condition of the biological and physical components and characteristics of rangelands. Guidelines are management approaches, methods, and practices that are intended to achieve a standard.

The BLM has defined four Fundamentals of Rangeland Health, which are the basic ecological principles underlying sustainable production of rangeland resources. These four fundamentals are embodied in the BLM's new Grazing Regulations (43 CFR Part 4100) and serve as the basis for standards and guidelines for grazing management on BLM-administered public lands in Utah. The fundamentals are as follows:

- Watersheds are in or making significant progress toward properly functioning physical condition. This condition includes their upland, riparian/wetland, and aquatic

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<sup>1</sup> This information was compiled from the Actual Use records of each livestock operator. When actual use was not available, licensed-use figures were used.

components. Soil and plant conditions support infiltration, soil moisture storage, and the release of water that are in balance with climate and landform, and maintain or improve water quality, and timing and duration of flow.

- Ecological processes, including the hydrologic cycle, nutrient cycle, and energy flow, are maintained, or there is significant progress toward their attainment, in order to support healthy biotic populations and communities.
- Water quality complies with State water quality standards and achieves, or is making significant progress towards achieving, established BLM management objectives such as meeting wildlife needs.
- Habitats are, or are making significant progress toward being, restored or maintained for Federal Threatened and Endangered species, Federal proposed, Category 1 and 2, Federal candidate, and other special status species.

### **3.7.2 Current Grazing Management Categories**

Following the four fundamentals, the Vernal BLM has since re-evaluated each grazing allotment and designated each as being in one of three management categories: Maintain (M), Improve (I), or Custodial (C). The criteria used for categorizing the allotments were based on resource potential, resource use conflicts or controversy, opportunity for positive economic return on public investments, and the present management situation. Sixty allotments are in the I category, 47 are in the M category, and 53 are in the C category.

#### ***3.7.2.1 Category M – Maintain Existing Resource Conditions***

- The present ecological condition and management are satisfactory.
- Either:
  1. Late to climax seral stage condition will be maintained under present management, if desired; or
  2. Conditions are mid seral stage or improving, with improvement expected to continue under present management, if desired; or
  3. Opportunities for BLM management are limited, either because the percentage of public land is low or the acreage of public lands is small.
- There are no major, land-use resource conflicts with livestock grazing.
- Land ownership status may or may not limit grazing management opportunities.
- Opportunities for positive economic return from public investment may exist.

#### ***3.7.2.2 Category I – Improve Existing Resource Conditions***

- Present ecological condition is unsatisfactory.
- Ecological condition is in early to mid seral stage.
- Ecological condition is in mid to late seral stage.
- Ecological succession is expected to regress further.
- Allotment has a potential for medium to high vegetation production, but production is low to moderate.
- Resource conflicts/controversy with livestock grazing are evident.

- There is potential for positive economic return on public investment.

***3.7.2.3 Category C – Custodial Management***

- Present ecological condition is not in a declining trend.
- Allotment has a low vegetation production potential and is producing near this level.
- There may be limited conflicts between livestock grazing and other resources.
- Present management is satisfactory or is the only logical management under existing conditions.
- Opportunities for positive economic return on public investments do not exist.

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